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## THE TRUTH ABOUT JESUS

Three main questions regarding Jesus are: Did he ever live? What sort of person was he? What is his significance for religion? All three of these questions are treated in a recent volume of lectures by Loofs,<sup>1</sup> and one phase of the first question, viz., the non-Christian testimony to Jesus' existence, is the subject of a new monograph by Linck.<sup>2</sup>

A book written in Latin is something of novelty these days, but Linck presents no very novel conclusions. He examines the testimony of Josephus, Pliny, Tacitus, and Suetonius. The passage in Josephus' *Antiquities*, XVIII, iii, 3, is found to be spurious in its present form, but it is not rejected outright. A possible original is reconstructed as follows: *ἦν δὲ τότε δὴ Ἰησοῦς, ὁ καὶ λεγόμενος Χριστός, σοφὸς ἀνὴρ, ὃς πολλοὺς μὲν Ἰουδαίους, πολλοὺς δὲ καὶ τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ ἐπηγάγετο. Καὶ ἐνδείξει τῶν πρώτων ἀνδρῶν παρὰ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ἀνεσταυρώθη, Πιλάτου κελεύοντος. Ἀλλ' εἰς ἔτι νῦν τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἀπὸ τοῦδε ὀνομασμένων οὐκ ἐπέλιπε τὸ φύλον.* The reference to Jesus in *Antiquities*, XX, ix, 1, is thought to be genuine. No reason is found for doubting Pliny's mention of Christians, and the much-discussed passage of Tacitus is held to be authentic. Even Suetonius, in spite of obscurities, is found to be a reliable witness. Altogether these non-Christian writers, and particularly Tacitus, are thought to make impossible any doubt about Jesus' existence: "Magister Nazarenus sub Pontio Pilato cruci affixus est. Cum Taciti verbis fides habeatur oporteat, Iesus vixisse nequitiam negari potest."

Loofs's book consists of six lectures delivered at Oberlin in the autumn of 1911. The delay in their publication has been occasioned by the addition of footnotes. These, however, do not bring the literature of the subject up to date but only, with two or three exceptions, up to the time when the lectures were first written. This defect is particularly noticeable in the first chapter, which deals with the controversy about Jesus' existence. In fact, the reader will hardly obtain from Loofs's treatment an adequate idea of the present status of this problem, particularly in Germany. By finding in America the "most important representative" of the view that Jesus never lived, the author is able to relieve his *Vaterland* of considerable responsibility. He passes lightly over the discussions of the subject which have come from Ger-

<sup>1</sup> *What is the Truth about Jesus Christ? Problems of Christology.* By Friederich Loofs. New York: Scribner, 1913. vii+241 pages. \$1.25.

<sup>2</sup> *De antiquissimis veterum quae ad Iesum Nazarenum spectant testimoniis scripsit* Kurt Linck. Giessen: Töpelmann, 1913. 115 pages. M. 4.

many in recent years, and Bruno Bauer, who in the last century argued the negative position in quite as comprehensive a manner as have any of its exponents in modern times, is not even mentioned. But W. B. Smith, whose skepticism is made the chief point of attack, is disposed of in summary fashion. His "fantastic edifice" and "shallow arguments" are refuted not in detail, but by referring to Paul's letters where ample evidence is found for belief in Jesus' historicity. And Smith's supposition that the data of these epistles are not genuine is declared to be "folly," "scientific bad-behaviour."

Lectures II-IV deal with the figure of the historical Jesus as portrayed by such so-called "liberal" theologians as Harnack, H. J. Holtzmann, O. Holtzmann, Baldensperger, J. Weiss, Jülicher, Weinelt, Heitmüller, and others of like opinion. The results of their work are declared to be untenable, for the alleged reason that they are prejudiced against recognizing sufficiently the supernatural element in Jesus' personality. This bias "interferes with an impartial opinion on the question as to the date of the gospels"; it is this also which leads to the preference for Mark's rather than John's chronology; it is this which forces scholars to deny Johannine authorship to the Fourth Gospel and to make assertions regarding the sources, which can be regarded only as "mistakes of learned sagacity"; it is this which compels critics to assume that the first appearance of the risen Jesus was in Galilee rather than in Jerusalem; in short, it is this prejudice which prevents these scholars from "rising above arbitrary results because they cannot make any use of the Jesus of the Gospels and do not have, all in all, another standard for eliminating what they consider not genuine than their individual taste." But "for a man whose judgments are unbiased" John's is the one truly apostolic gospel, and the representation in it as elsewhere that Jesus was a supernatural person is to be accepted as true to fact. Thus Loofs disposes of the modern "liberal" interpretation of Jesus.

In other words, when historical research seeks to understand the life of Jesus in normal human relationships, it is undertaking an impossible task, in Loofs's opinion. He concedes that historical science of itself cannot deal with supernatural entities, hence it can delineate only the human side of Jesus' career. Where it fails, then, is in not recognizing that there was another element in Jesus' constitution, which is not amenable to the laws of historical science. This is the point at which Loofs and the "liberals" whom he is criticizing come to a sharp parting of the ways. They ask for substantial historical evidence in support of the traditional notion regarding Jesus' supernatural character. He,

on the other hand, asserts that they have no right to demand this evidence; the recognition of Jesus' uniqueness is a matter of faith, and so belongs in a sphere which is perfectly inaccessible to science. But on what basis does faith rest? If it does not proceed from some substantial data, is it not practically synonymous with superstition? This point is recognized, and a basis for faith is found (1) in Jesus' own words, (2) in the primitive Christian community's belief about Jesus, and (3) in the belief of succeeding generations. The first of these points is admittedly a weak one logically, since "it is impossible to prove by any single saying of Jesus that his own words bear evidence that his life was not purely human. Only the general impression of the words of Jesus can be used. . . . But what the single words cannot achieve that is achieved by the whole." This is a doubtful line of reasoning, so far as logical validity is concerned. It is easy, however, to determine what the early community and its successors thought and felt about Jesus; but the crucial problem here is: Does this evidence prove the author's contention? He believes that it does, and all who disagree with this conclusion seem to him to be the victims of a blind prejudice. He fails to appreciate his opponents' main point, viz., that we must ask not only what Christians from earliest times have believed, or even what Jesus himself thought of his own person, but whether their belief rested upon substantial data. Does the existence of their belief prove the reality of the thing believed? Loofs says in substance that it does, while his opponents hold that primitive Christology is no more immune from critical investigation than is the primitive Christian's cosmology. This problem is too real and important to be denied its rights and dismissed as simply the result of bias and prejudice on the part of certain interpreters.

In estimating the religious significance of Jesus (Lectures V and VI) the author rejects the terminology of the ancient creeds on the ground that (1) it is logically untenable, (2) it does not agree with the New Testament, (3) it was influenced by antiquated conceptions of Greek philosophy. Instead of devising new formulas to take the place of the old ones which endeavored to explain *how* Jesus was what he was believed to be, Loofs is content to use terms which merely affirm *what* Jesus was, and in this he retains substantially the content of ancient doctrine. But he says the question *how* must remain a mystery—"it would be attempting impossible things if we tried to understand the historical person of Christ."

The value of this volume lies in the apologetic rather than the

historical field. It is an attempt to conserve Jesus' religious value for readers who have become acquainted with historical research, but who feel that Jesus will lose his worth for them if they consistently apply scientific methods of investigation in their study of Jesus' historical personality. For a student who finds himself compelled to abandon Loofs' halting attitude because it is felt to be unworthy of true scholarship, and so ultimately subversive of faith, and who still wishes an adequate estimate of Jesus' religious worth, the present book has no message.

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## TWO RECENT CHURCH HISTORY MONOGRAPHS

In more or less close connection with the *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, edited by Gustav Krueger, there have appeared recently two small books. The first of these, by Gerhard Loeschke,<sup>1</sup> contains two studies, only the latter of which was first designed to form a part of the church history just mentioned. The first study concerns itself with the importance, or lack of importance, of the gospel in the development of the early Christian communities. Its thesis is that the teachings of the gospel, as set forth in the New Testament canon, were of relatively slight importance in the development of the Christian group life until well on into the third century. Of much greater importance in shaping its standards of conduct were, in the author's opinion, the ideals and practices of the Hellenistic-Jewish society of the Empire. In his eyes the church was not built upon the ground of the gospel, but rather "grew up out of the Hellenistic-Jewish synagogue. For the cult this is obviously true; for the constitution this is also at present widely recognized; for belief, morality, and piety the case is essentially no different." This study occupies the first eleven pages of the book; the remaining space is devoted to the sketch entitled "Quellenkunde der alten Kirchengeschichte."

In this study the task set himself by the author was never completed since he was interrupted by death. As they stand, the pages give an interesting sketch of the source material for the history of the church from its origin down into the sixth century. Besides describing the various classes of material and estimating their value, the author indicates here and there a body of source material that from one point of view or

<sup>1</sup> *Zwei Kirchengeschichtliche Entwürfe*. Von Gerhard Loeschke. Tübingen: Mohr, 1913. 78 pages.